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Aboriginal Tribes of Southern India

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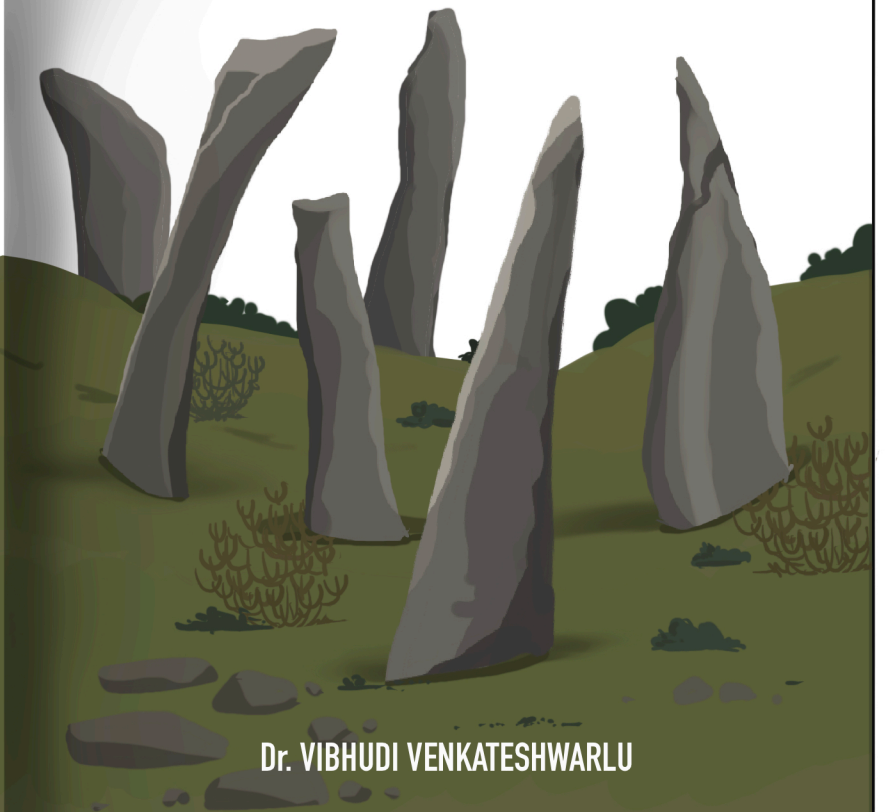
Their Religious Journey from Animism to Hinduism



Dr. VIBHUDI VENKATESHWARLU

ABORIGINAL TRIBES OF SOUTHERN INDIA

(THEIR RELIGIOUS JOURNEY FROM ANIMISM TO HINDUISM)

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To

Late Vibhudi Buchaiah & Late Vibhudi Bhavanamma
in memories of our journeys
in tribal country

FOREWORD

Arvind Tiwari

India is home to one of the largest populations in the world. Indigenous communities such as the Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, and Yanadis, mostly residing in South India, have historically inherited religious traditions like Saivism, Vaishnavism and Virasaivism. Religion has been a significant aspect of their social organization and identity, shaping opportunities and experiences of discrimination. Although often overlooked, the influence of religion has deeply affected Aboriginal mobility and the formation of diaspora communities in South India. Viewing Aboriginal tribes through their religious journey from Animism to Hinduism, reveals how they gradually lost their interconnections, faced misunderstandings regarding their distinct racial and cultural identities, and experienced the erosion of their rights and opportunities in modern times. Reclaiming these rights and opportunities remains a major challenge. This book is a response to that challenge.

It is noteworthy to mention that my association with Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu began in 2017, when he was awarded a Post-Doctoral Fellowship by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, in the field of Law on the topic "UN Convention on Indigenous People: Social, Cultural and Political Status of Beda (Budga) Jangam Caste." He was registered under my advisorship at School of Law, TISS, Mumbai. The report was submitted in 2021 as part of the Post-Doctoral Fellowship. The present book is the culmination of that research study.

This volume presents a critical analysis of the transformation of the Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, and Yanadis from Animism to Hinduism and other religions. It not only opens up a neglected perspective on Indigenous peoples but also demonstrates how law provides insights into social, political, and institutional responses to tribes and their discriminatory consequences. The manner in which tribes are conceived in law, how legal regulation is sought or resisted, and how judicial processes operate are inseparably part of this complex institution today. Furthermore, the book aligns tribal perspectives rooted in Saivism, Vaishnavism, and other traditions with contemporary realities, where sociological facts are inseparable from legal frameworks and litigation at both national and international levels.

The concern of law is not merely the social scientific description of tribes but the mitigation of inequality and discrimination, and the conceptualization of these issues in ways that allow effective legal protection. This book provides a window into the modern social life of Aboriginal tribes while also educating readers on how tribal marginalization is shaped and circumscribed by law.

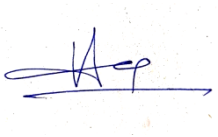
The book reflects not only law in theory but also law in practice. Its insights are developed and refined from a law and public policy perspective. The depth of conceptualization, keen

observation, and understanding of caste and tribal realities are enriched by practical engagement in South India, along with a strong awareness of national and international legal landscapes.

Dr. Vibhudi has presented critical analyses supported by empirical evidence and guided by an ethical framework. Through intensive analysis, the author brings an activist's perspective on discrimination against Aboriginal tribes in South India and discusses the legal frameworks for its prevention. In the contemporary context, where identity-based socio-legal challenges are widely debated, this book offers an empirically grounded critical analysis and suggests pathways to strengthen the rights of Aboriginal tribes.

I hope this publication will encourage students, researchers, and faculty members in social sciences, tribal studies, and legal studies to undertake more projects of this nature.

I extend my best wishes to Dr. Vibhudi on the publication of this book.



Dr. Arvind Tiwari
Professor & Dean
School of Law
Rights and Constitutional Governance
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

ABOUT THE BOOK

N. VENKATESHWARLU

I am delighted and immensely proud of Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu remarkable achievement in authoring “Aboriginal Tribes of Southern India.” His dedication to researching, documenting, and preserving the rich cultural heritage of these indigenous communities is truly commendable.

This book offers a timely and meticulous exploration of these marginalized yet culturally vibrant societies. Drawing upon decades of ethnographic research, historical analysis, and firsthand engagement, it presents a comprehensive account of their socio-cultural structures, economic practices, and spiritual worldviews. Importantly, it highlights the systemic injustices they face—land alienation, cultural appropriation, and socio-economic exclusion—and advocates for their rightful place in India’s developmental narrative.

More than just a scholarly work, this book serves as a bridge connecting the past to the present, ensuring that the traditions, struggles, and wisdom of these tribes are acknowledged and remembered. His passion for anthropology, history, and social justice shines through every page, making this a valuable contribution to both academia and society.

This work is not only an academic achievement but also a call to action. It urges policymakers, researchers, and civil society to re-examine conservation models, land rights, and educational frameworks to ensure that tribal voices are heard and their rights protected. For students of anthropology, history, and sociology, it is an essential resource; for the general reader, it provides a window into a world often overlooked but integral to India’s diverse heritage.

As his teacher, it is incredibly rewarding to see a student channel curiosity into such impactful work. May this book inspire others to appreciate and protect our nation’s diverse cultural fabric. Keep writing, exploring, and enlightening the world with his knowledge.

I am wishing Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu continued success in all his future endeavours!

1-06-2025
HYDERABAD

PROF. (Dr.) N. VENKATESHWARLU
Professor & Dean
Department of Law, Osmania University

MESSAGE

CHITTARI ANANTHAIA

This edition is reflecting ancient history of hunter-gatherers in South India, their customary practices, Building of dolmens and erection of Menhirs and stone circles, which are focal issues addressed by Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu in this edition.

This book is important book for Aboriginal tribes of Southern India and their origins specially the Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savara and Yanadis and these tribes are pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidians and nomadic tribes settled during Neolithic period in South India. This book also having information of all these aboriginal tribes are belonging to same race at one point of time, several tribes and castes were invented and discarded from these aboriginal tribes.

Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu, has described about the formation of tribes and castes in South India, described their religious faith, belief and practice. Several religious movements were responsible for divisions among the tribes such as military castes were emerged from 2nd Century BCE to 4th Century AD onwards, Beda, Bedar, Boya, Veddas and Vendens from the Aboriginal tribes of Kurumbas or Kurubas, and decedents of their common race of Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi tribes.

Aboriginal tribes in South India are innocent, their education is significantly low, their economic development is unusually vulnerable, their lives are under a great threat, no participation in the Government from these tribes. They are continuously neglecting by ruling castes, their condition in deep forest is under great. Governments are not supporting for their hunting activity, traditional practice. They also dependents on the individual and governments, their educational status is very low compare with other schedule tribes, other tribes are taking away their opportunities. Tribes of scheduled tribes list under the Constitution of India. Due to which, actual tribes are moving in the deeper forest.

I am wishing Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu continued success in all his future endeavours!

Date: 1-11-2025

CHITTARI ANANTHAIAH
Advocate
Sangareddy

PREFACE

Bringing the history of the aboriginal tribes of Southern India, namely the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi, down to the present day, and incorporating the latest archaeological, anthropological, and sociological findings, has long been felt necessary. The pioneering works of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, Newbold, Edgar Thurston, Syed Siraj-ul-Hassan, Subba Rao, Vennelakanti Raghavaiah, and F. R. Allchin laid the foundation for ethnographic, sociological, cultural, and political studies of these tribes. However, in both factual content and general outlook, much of the earlier scholarship has now become dated, and the subject requires re-examination and restatement in the light of recent research and field evidence.

The present study attempts to examine a few fundamental questions, such as whether the aboriginal tribes of Southern India belonged to one homogeneous or endogamous group at an earlier point in time, or whether they emerged as distinct groups. This question is examined through a comparative study of their endogamous and exogamous divisions, as well as their social, cultural, and ritual practices. The study also draws attention to early historic and prehistoric archaeological sites associated with the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi tribes. Their ancestors erected megalithic monuments such as menhirs, dolmens, and stone circles during the Iron Age, and these structures are compared with the cultural and ritual practices that continue among these tribes even today.

This work seeks to fill an important gap by examining whether the present-day Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi represent related endogamous groups that once formed a single tribal stock. The book is primarily intended for students and researchers in Archaeology, Anthropology, Sociology, Legal Studies, and allied disciplines, as well as for scholars working in universities, research institutions, and policy-making bodies. In view of the increasing interest among English-language readers in the study of megalithic monuments such as dolmens and menhirs in South India, it is also hoped that this work will appeal to general readers seeking a clear and non-technical account of the aboriginal tribes and their cultural history.

This study aims to remove confusion regarding the identity of the PVTGs, Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi among policymakers, scholars, and the general public. It seeks to generate greater interest in these tribes across Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu by examining their historical connections through a comparative analysis of their endogamous and exogamous divisions. The book also serves as a useful reference for demographic and official records of these tribes from 1881 to 2011. The origins of these aboriginal tribes, their roots in South India, and their gradual transition from animistic belief systems to Hindu religious traditions are empirically examined and comparatively discussed.

During the course of fieldwork, valuable information was gathered from elders of these indigenous communities. They explained their religious beliefs, cultural practices, social organization, and traditional knowledge systems. They consistently articulated that they are the original inhabitants of their respective regions and that they have been identified by different names by outsiders over time. They also expressed concerns regarding displacement due to mining activities, neglect by governmental agencies, political exploitation by non-tribal groups, and the inclusion of non-tribal communities in the Scheduled Tribes list. According to them, such practices have resulted in the marginalization of genuine tribal communities and the loss of educational, employment, and political opportunities.

To conduct this research, I consulted members of the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi tribes across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu since 2018. The successful completion of this book would not have been possible without their cooperation and support. I am especially grateful to subject experts and community leaders such as **Thokala Pedda**

Guruvaiah, Bhoomani Ravindra, Nallapothula Ayodya, Thokala Laxmi Devi, and several tribal leaders, who provided valuable data, oral histories, and insights into the social and cultural life of these tribes.

This research was undertaken in response to contradictory interpretations found in official records on Scheduled Tribes and in earlier scholarly works. Historically, these aboriginal tribes practiced animistic religions, and over time, with the influence of religious movements such as Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Vira-Saivism in South India, their religious identities underwent significant changes. The study examines the view that the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi communities were earlier associated with Buddhist traditions and were later assimilated into Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Vira-Saivism. During this process, their identities were altered, and they came to be known by names such as Boya, Beda, Bedar, Vedan, and Vedda, and later as Boya Sanyasi, Beda Sanyasi, Boya Dasari, Beda Dasari, Chenchu Dasari and Beda Jangam, Boya Jangam (Budga) Jangam etc.

The central hypothesis of this research is that the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi tribes belonged to one endogamous stock at an earlier point in time and that their ethno-history and cultural practices exhibit strong similarities. The study addresses specific research questions, including whether these tribes belong to the same stock, whether they were responsible for the erection of dolmens, menhirs, and stone circles in Southern India, and whether their original belief systems were animistic in nature.

To answer these questions, the study examines historical, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence including Census reports. These tribes have customary practices of erecting menhirs in memory of the dead. They also possess traditional medical knowledge and continue to treat illnesses using herbal and indigenous medicinal practices available in their natural surroundings.

The study finds that these tribes exhibit striking similarities in marriage customs, birth and death rituals, and other customary practices. On this basis, it argues that they represent the same tribal stock, later divided and differentiated due to religious conversions to Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Vira-Saivism.

This work establishes that these tribes constitute an ancient aboriginal population, predating Aryan and Dravidian influences, and that they shared a common cultural heritage during the Neolithic and Mesolithic periods. Their ancestors erected dolmens, menhirs, and stone circles across South India. The study also documents several megalithic structures that have not been previously recorded, thereby contributing new data to the field of South Indian archaeology.

As part of this research, several dolmen and menhir sites in the Telangana region were identified and documented using visual ethnography and snowball sampling methods. These include dolmen sites at Penimilla village; Veltoor village of Uppununthala Mandal; Padmaram Thanda (Siddapur), Achampet Mandal, Nagarkurnool District; Gonakole village, Gundlapally (Dindi) Mandal, Nalgonda District; Kothula Retta Banda and Pandavula Gutta in Veldanda village and Mandal, Nagarkurnool District. These visits were made with the assistance of local residents, scholars, and advocates whose support is gratefully acknowledged.

Similarly, several menhir sites were identified in Telangana, including Penimilla village, Cherukupally village, Seripally village, Mannevaripally village, Guntipally Gate, Kamsanipally village, and Mudumal village. The documentation of these sites was made possible through the active support of scholars, advocates, teachers, and community members, without whom this fieldwork would not have been possible. Due to time and financial constraints, several potential sites along the riverbanks of the Dindi, Krishna, Godavari, and their tributaries could not be explored. Many of these sites are located near the Nallamalla forest region, traditionally inhabited by the Chenchu tribe, whose ancestors are believed to have played a significant role in the erection of megalithic monuments.

Therefore, this book serves as an important resource for students and researchers in Anthropology, Archaeology, Sociology, Law, and Justice. It also provides methodological insights for research scholars across disciplines and contributes to a deeper understanding of the aboriginal heritage of Southern India.

1-11-2025 **Dr. Vibhudi Venkateshwarlu**

HYDERABAD

ABOUT THE COVER PAGE

PR N. SAILESH NAIK

The cover page of this edition is ancient history of Aboriginal tribes, and Hunter-gatherers in South India, their customary practices, Building of Dolmens, erection of Menhirs and stone circles, which are focal issues in this edition, the same is reflecting into the cover page.

.

This book is designed by Mr. N. Sailesh Naik, who is my student, during his LL.M., from P.G. College of Law, Osmania University. He has ample research ideas and skills in Fine Arts and Legal Studies. He has passion about the research relating to new fields such as permaculture, natural living, archaeology, anthropology and legal studies. He is also associated with Friends of Snake Society, Hyderabad.

His services are required for Universities, Colleges and Research Institutions, for learning and training in different fields of knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

The Tribal population is found in almost all parts of the world. India has the largest concentration of tribal population. The tribals are the autochthonous people of the land who are believed to be the earliest settlers in the Indian Peninsula.[1] the aboriginal tribes in Southern India, are pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian human races. They are hunter-gatherers and nomadic tribes. They rerected stone circles, menhirs, for memory of their leaders, they made paintings on the rocks and caves (messolithic). They are vulnerable groups, and indigenous people, their way of life is influenced by the colonial ruler's right from the Sathavahanas to Chalukyas in the ancient history. Subsequently, Aryan, Islamic and British colonies exploited them in several wayas and influenced with new foreign doctrines, several changes made into their social, culture, religious practices.

The Hindu sectorial religious movements in South India made new caste-society from aboriginal communities. They are known as Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi are primitive tribes called as PVTG groups (perticularly vulnerable tribal groups). These were the same endogamous stock at one point of time, assumingly before AD 4th Century.[2] These were named and further divided into Kurumbas, Beda బేడ (Kannada-ಬೇಡಾ), Bedar బెడర్ (Marati-बेडर), Boya బోయ (Telugu), and Vedan వెడన్ (Tamil-வேடன்) all are belonging to a single community at one point of time, decendents of aboriginal tribes and ancient men. Now, they are calling as Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, Yenadi, Valmiki Boya, Beda, Bedar, Vedan, Veddas, Vedoid, Kurumba, Golla, Kuruva etc. at one point of time they were sub-divided by upper caste and priestly class, identified with defferent names as Boya, Beda, Bedar, Vedan, Vedoid and Veddas, according to their occupation of military (warriors) and region of Telugu, Kannada, Marati, Tamil, Malayali and Sri Lanka. And they were good cattle lifters, cattle lifting was a type of strategy at warfare.[3]

Aboriginal people of Southern India were inhabited hill tract slopes from times immemorial. They live near water falls at tiny forest, they are hunter-gatherers live by game and chase. They are good **marks men** with their bows and arrows. They collect tubes and roots for their livelihood. They were initially, used stone tools (megalithic) for their game and later they improved their tools with wooden and skin combination. Bow and arrow improved with wooden, animal skin and Iron metals (neolithic). They knew skills like weaving of mats, baskets and other articles and they construct huts with bamboo tree and grass with thatched roofs. Bamboo poles are using to create the walls, grass is used for thatched roofs. South India was already peopled with aboriginals of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, Yanadis when the Dravidians arrive, they are pre-dravidians. These aboriginal tribes are pre-aryan, pre-dravidians and nomadic tribes in Southern India.

Greek, in the Hellenistic period the programme of the gymnasia and palaestra expanded to include new exercises, such as fencing, archery and even the firing of catapults, and thus continued to satisfy the essential needs of military training.[4] Even archery was become important instrument for the armies, because it can be used and reached the target from long distance without much loss. During ninth and tenth Centuries Western and Middle East societies were icreased its use with horse men called horse archery.[5] Indian sub-continent, Aboriginal tribes of South India were traditionally

good archerers, forcefully recruited into various kingdoms as an archery force, they were joined with their traditional weapons of bow and arrow[6] into ***Satavahana*** kingdom AD 230 (230 AD)[7] AD 225[8] (BC 3rd Century to AD 3rd Century)[9]. ***Pallava*** Kindom AD 200 AD to AD 900.[10] (AD 2nd Century to AD 9th Century). ***Vishnukundis*** AD 420 to AD 620 (AD 4th Century to AD 6th Century),[11] ***Chalukaya*** kingdom is AD 608 to AD 1210[12] (AD 5th Century to AD 12th Centuries).[13] The *Kadamba* AD 350 to AD 360 Centuries.[14] ***Rashtrakuta*** kingdom is AD 630 to AD 808[15] (AD 6th Century to AD 8th Century). ***Cholas*** Kingdom (AD 9th Century to AD 13th Century).[16] ***Kakatiya*** Kingdom is AD 1000 to AD 1323[17] (AD 1st Century to AD 10th Century) and ***Vijayanagar*** Kingdom is AD 1336 to AD 1579[18] (AD 13th Century to AD 16th Century) and other empires. In the North, the Guptas are ruled from AD 275 to AD 680[19] (AD 3rd Century to AD 7th Century).[20]

Religion and Castes of South Indian Kings: the ***Satavahana*** Andhras or Andhrabhrityas[21] are Brahmins[22] Saivism by religion. The ***Pallavas*** (Kanchi) are Brahmins belonging to *Bharadvaja gotra,*[23] they are Vaishnavites[24] by religion. Vishnukundins (Keesara gutta) are Brahmins,[25] belonging to Gautama *gotra*,[26] Saivites by religion.[27] The ***Kadamba*** (Vanavasi) are Brahmins[28] belonging to Manavya *gotra*, call themselves as Haritiputra (Agniras *gotra*).[29] ***Chalukaya*** (Vatapi/Badami) are Kannada Brahmins belonging to Gautama *gotra*,[30] practiced Saivam and later ages they practiced Vaishnavam, and ***Cholas*** (Vellalar) Vaishnavites by religion, ***Rashtrakuta*** (Sudras, local Yadavas). ***Kakatiya*** (Sudras) practiced Jaina & Saiva religions and ***Vijayanagar*** (Sudras) practiced Vaishnavam. In the North the Guptas are Vaishnavam by religion (Brahmins).[31]

Early ***Chalukaya*** (vatapipura/Badami) AD 525 to AD 757[32] - (Kannada Brahmins) belonging to Gautama gotra, they were origin from Kadambas.[33] The Chalukayas were later stages divided with their captical as Eastren, Westren. Eastern Chalukyas (Vengi) AD 6th Century to AD 11th Century (AD 624 Century to AD 1075 Century).[34] Western Chalukyas (Badami) are belonging to ***manavya*** gotra.[35] Later Chalukyas of Kalyani AD 973 Century to AD 1200 Century Mudigonda Chalukyas,

Down fall of the Buddhism had a firm root in the Pallava realm at Kanchi during the time of Mahendra and is also independently attested by Hiuen Tsang.[36] North India, the Indus cities were destroyed by the Aryans who entered into India from Iran and Afghanistan through north-western passes such as the Bolan and the Khyber.[36] It seems that the down fall of the Buddhism started from Pallavas in South India, Pallava kings are Brahmins by caste. The saivam rised during Pallava realm in South India most of the Buddhist Aramas and Stupas converted into Saiva and Vaishnava Shrines, several aboriginal tribes were forced to convert into the Saivam.[37] During the Chalukyas of Vengi, most powerful hill tribes were forcefully recruited into the Army. They also gifted lands for their services.[38]

During the Pallava and Chalukyas period, the aboriginal tribes of South India were forced to be recruited into Army, as Archery force (cross bowmen), these aboriginal tribes of militia class identified with various names as *Boya* in Telugu Countries, *Beda* in Kannada Countries, *Bedar* in Marati Countries and *Vedan* in Tamil Countries and Veddas in Srilanka. Pallavas recruited initially Kurumbas as bowmen, later, they named as Bedas, Veddas.[39] This new class of caste is invented during Pallavas and Chalukyuas and their feudal kings in South India.

Allchin rightly explained divisions of aboriginal tribes, he say that, "the Gollas present a different state of affairs. As with equally widely diffused Kurumbas and Kurubas they comprise many different economic levels, ranging from isolated jungle groups to those who have attached themselves to villages".[40] Their original religion was animism and some of they practiced and propagated Buddhism. During the reign of the Satavahana, Pallava and Vishnukundis they were converted into Saivam under the influence of great teacher of *Adi Sankara*.

The aboriginal tribes of Kurumbas, Chenchus were sub-divided by Religious movements of *Saivam* as sanyasi సన్యాసి (AD 8th Century), *Vaishnavam* as Dasari దాసరి (AD 10th Century) and *Vira-saivam* as Jangam జంగం (AD 12th Century) new castes were materialized as Boya Sanyasi, Beda Sanyasi, Bedar Sanyasi, Vedan Sanyasi, Boya Dasari, Beda Dasari, Veda Dasari, Vedan Dasari, and Boya Jangam, Beda Jangam, Beddarlu Jangam, Vaduga Jangam, Vedda Jangam.[41] According to Majundar, the lower castes of today, most of them had a tribal origin.[42]

The colonial ethnographers have not ignited idea to examin the fragmented castes by martial profession in Southern India such as Boya, Beda, Bedar, Vedan, Vedoid and Veddas. There are clearly visible connections between caste and culture of Dravidian aboriginal tribes. The dominant groups in every historical period, whether Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the power elites of pre-medieval era, kept the caste discourse going on in one form or the other for their vested interests. Brahamins were success in formation of several tribes into castes (by profession) by introuducing several identities right from Chenchu to Yanadi and Beda to Veddas. Profession was a tool icon for sucessful naming and division of tribes into Brahmanical fold, hinduised them by introducing Hindu cultural practices, rituals into tribes.

This work is done to trace the early history of the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi a primitive indigenuos communities and to prove that they are same group at one point of time. Beda, Bedar, Boya,[43] Vedan were militia sub-class of these groups, twisted by warior occupation, worked in various dyanasties as mentioned above paragraphs. These Dravidian aboriginal sects are identical each other with their customary practices of marriage, birth, death rituals, occupation, food habits of eating of fork, rats and fish, folk songs, and settlemens in caste panchayats (caste councils). This work is examined the surnames of present Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yenadi which strongly establishing that they are belonging to one stock at one point of time. This study comparatively examined the characteristics of the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi from the medieval period to the present. This research found out that the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara, and Yanadi divisions were emerged by their regional habitation, food habit, language, and occupation etc., and their forefathers were erected dolmens, menhirs, stone circles in South India. The Bedas, Bedars, Boyas, Vedans[44] differently identified with result of militia occupation in various dynasties of Telugu, Kannada, Marati and Tamil countries and subsequently, they became castes. However, due to their habitual habit of hunting, eating of meat and driking of alcohol, socially lowered and looked down by the upper caste people.

That the Government its negligence, failure to identify the historical facts and to include these communities in the list of scheduled tribes, as aboriginal tribes and indigenous people and to provide special inputs for their development including education, employment, and special status. The

Government and its agents with misunderstandingly included as Bedar in scheduled caste and Beda in scheduled tribe, Vedan in Schedule tribe as Malai Vedan and Vetan in backward castes. There is no special status for the Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, and Yanadis for their development. They are included in the Scheduled Tribes list, but they are not able to access fruits of said reservation policy, detailed abtracts given in the tables in respect of each tribe about their education, employment and religious status, interpreted from the Census of 2011.

This research work is titled with *Aboriginal tribes of Southern India their Religious Journey from Animism to Hinduism,* with the objective of, to establish aboriginal tribes of South India are same endogamous race, specifically Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi are belong to one endogamous stock at one point of time, yet their ethnohistory, religious gods and cultural practice are the same, they were builders of rock shelters called dolmens and were erected stones for the memories of their dead called "Menhirs". To establish this fact and make connection with present tribes, several ethnographic and historical notes are studied and reviewed for completion of this work among them some of selected and important works are given under the literature of review as;

Literature: Newbold (1846) the Chenchwars; a wild tribe, inhabiting the forests of the Eastern Ghats. Published in the journal of the royal Asiatic society Great Britain and Ireland, Vol.VIII, London, in which, the author explained about the Chenchus and their exogamous divisions.

Forbes Watson, J. & Jahn William Kaye (1875) the People of India, Vol.VIII, India Museum London, this anthropological work had been established about the aboriginal tribes of India including Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi.

Edgar Thurston (1909) Castes and Tribes of Southern India, anthropological survey of India had been constituted to study the castes and tribes of South India, which is official documentary evidence to trace out the aboriginal people of South India. This research work had been established that the Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are the same group of tribal race in South India.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943), the Chenchus jungle folk of the Deccan, Macmillan & Co. London and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1989) Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. These two documents are pioneer works on the Aboriginal People of South India.

Singh, K.A (2006) People of India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu are reliable anthropological study to compare with cultural affinities of Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi tribes.

Ethnographic notes on Chenchus, Yanadis, Gadabas, Irulas, and Savaras from the Census of India, 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921 are crucial reports to understand about the cultural affinities of aboriginal tribes of Southern India.

Census Reports, the Census of Madras presidency enumerated Animist population in 1901, 1911 for tribal population. The Census of Madras, 1901 of Chenchus of Animist 3322, Gadabas, 9554, Irular, 231, Savara, 79971 and Yanadis, 64 and the Census of Madras, 1911 the Gadabas of Animist 1389, Irular, 5382, Savaras 64937 and Yanadis 40141.

Ethnographic notes on Chenchus by Census of Hyderabad, 1931 Part-I in page number 270 clearly explained their exogamous and endogamous divisions which are explains that the Chenchus, Gadaba, Iruala, Savara and Yanadis are same tribal race. A blood grouping study by Kirk, R., Lai, L., Vos, G., Wickremasinghe, R., & Perera, D (1962) established that, "on the basis of physical comparisons the Veddahs of Ceylon are considered by some to be related to certain tribes in South India generically referred to as Veddoid or Australoid (Veddas). These tribes include the Chenchu, Paniyan and Irulas".[45]

Ethnographic notes on Animism by Census of Madras, 1911 part-I, page number 62 says that Chenchus, Savaras, Yanadis are animist and they are Hinduised. The principal sites of Neolithic culture are found in the Salem, Cuddapah, Anantapur, Bellary and Kurnool districts of Madras. Simmons, R.T. etc. Paper explains that, the following castes and tribes are considered to be descended from Neolithic man: Yanadis, Irulas, Malakudias, Kudubis, Kadirs or Karans, Koudhs, Cherumis, Holayas and Chenchu.[46]

Man in India, Vol.V of 1925: The Aboriginal Tribes in the Ramayana by G. Ramadasu described about the Savaras at page numbers 28-55. Man in India Vol.XI, 1931: Explain about the tribes that, the grama devatis of Orissa many of them were Vajrayana deities in origin, e.g. Jagulai (Jangalr), Vasulai, Pansai (Parnasfavari), Vajara, Mahakala, Thakurani, etc. 'The worshippers of these as well as other village deities of Orissa are non-Brahmans, often belonging to low castes, e.g. Varik, Mali, Bhopa, Chintapatri etc. It is certain that the last three were non-Aryans, probably belonging to the Savara tribe. 'Throughout Orissa these people are the worshippers of Siva at least who is confessed to be a non-Aryan deity in origin, but who now occupies a prominent place in the Hindu pantheon. No orthodox Brahman in Orissa would therefore eat the prasada of Siva, generally prepared by 'those low caste men, who are (or at least were) both dhogapandas and pujapandas." (at page number 25). Further, in this volume (at page numer 68) described as follows; they are (Yanadis) nomadic and thieving clan. They are divided into several classes according to their occupation. 'Thus Reddi Yenadis are cultivators "who are found mostly in the Guntur District and who lead a settled with luxurious life. The Kappala Yenadis are so called because they eat frogs and a miserable life, 'The Nakkala Yenadis are "more enterprising and are found mostly in Godavari and Vizagapatam Districts. They are 80 called because they look like Nakkas or foxes and they are as cunning as those animals. They fare very fond of thieving and hence are classified 98 a criminal tribe and watched by police from place to place. All those Yenadi clans are akin to Boyas, Chinchus and Patchapas.

Ramadas, G. explained about Gadabas, their origin, occupation and culture (at page number 160-173). Indian Antiquary: It is said that Savari belong to the hill tribe called Savara. Nagarjuna converted them into Tantrayana Buddhism during his time.[47] It is a incidental fact that the Buddhist tribes, i.e. Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis were converted into Hinduism by introducing tatric idealogy into Buddhism.

By the above discussions, the aboriginal tribes are not hindus, they are animist, after Buddhist movement they embrased into Buddhism, but due probagation of Hindu religion reformers (saivam, vaishnavam and vira-saivam) in South India, the aboriginal tribes were influenced with their custom,

practice, beliefs, they imitated their dominant cultural practices, they transformed from Buddhism to Saivam, Vaishnavam and Vira-Saivam. Adi-sankara initiated to convert aboriginal tribes into Saivam, he stayed at Srishailam for coversion of Chenchus into Saivam. Several aboriginal tribes were converted into Saivam, Ramanuja and his followers worked for conversion of tribes into Vaishnavam and finally Basavanna started Veera-saivam (neo saivam) in South India.

Traditional Mendicants: Aboriginal tribes are medicine men, the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis are self-healing tribes; they know the medicinal properties of trees and plants. Jesurathnam Devarapalli, Ethnomedical Practices of Chenchu-A Case of Integrated System, Journal of Human Ecology (2007) and Reddy, M.B in his article, A Survey of Medicinal Plants of Chenchu Tribes of Andhra Pradesh, India (1988) these two works explain about, the Chenchus are traditional mendicants, and they use plants, its leaves for self-healing. Similarly, Prakash Rao, E.V., Herbal Medicine as Sustainable Livelihood: A Case of Irula Tribal Women Welfare Society from Rural India, (2007) explaining the Irula medical techniques. That the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis are traditional mendicant communities they know, how and when to use herbal medicines for their medical requirement.

Demography: The Chenchus, according to 2011 Census, they exist in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha and Telangana. Their total population in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is 64,227 (32,196 male and 32,031 females), in Karnataka their total population is 15 (6 male and 9 females), in Ordisha their total population is 13 (6 males and 7 females). For more details see the Beda (Budga) Jangam (A Nomadic Tribe of Southern India: Its Religious Journey from Tribe to Caste) at Page Nos.249-251.

The Gadabas, according to 2011 Census, they exist in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Telangana. Their total population in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is 38,081 (18,518 male and 19,563 females), in Odisha their total population is 84689 (40953 males and 43736 females).

The Irulas, according to 2011 Census, they are exising in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Their total population in Tamil Nadu is 1,89,661 (94,521 male and 95,140 females), in Karnataka their total population is 703 (360 male and 343 females). For more details see the Beda (Budga) Jangam (A Nomadic Tribe of Southern India: Its Religious Journey from Tribe to Caste) at Page Nos.258-261. The Iruliga, according to 2011 Census, they exist in Karnataka. Their total population in Karnataka is 10,259 (5,267 male and 4,992 females). For more details see the Beda (Budga) Jangam (A Nomadic Tribe of Southern India: Its Religious Journey from Tribe to Caste) at Page Nos.258-261.

The Savaras, according to 2011 Census, they exist in Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha. Their total population in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is 139424 (68432 male and 70992 females), in Odisha their total population is 534751 (264364 male and 264364 females).

The Yanadis, according to 2011 Census, they are exising in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Their total population in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana is 5,37,808 (2,72,203 male and 2,65,605 females). For more details see the Beda (Budga) Jangam (a nomadic tribe of southern India: its religious journey from tribe to caste) at page Nos.295-297.

Folk singers: the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis are folk singers, they sing and dance during rituals, festivals and fairs. They sing songs of love, rain, forest, animals, hunting, gods

and other specific. They use musical instruments of Veena, Thambura, flute, Maddela and thaalam etc. while they singing.

Superstitions: the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis are believes superstitions, they worship devil god, sacrifice of Goats, Sheeps, Pigs, Buffalos etc., to get rid of them and cast out them.

Stonehenge: the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis age belonging to stoneage people and ancient men of megalithic culture, and their forefathers were erected several dolmens, menhirs, stone circles in South India. Victor Rosner, *Dolmens in the Anamalai Hills, South India* (1959), Bird David, N., *the Nilgiri Tribal Systems: A view from below* (1994), Murthy, M.L.K., *Ethnoarchaeologhy of the Kurnool Cave areas, South India* (1985) and William, A. Noble, *Nilgiri Dolmens* (1976) these of few described that the Chenchus, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadis belonging to Megalithic people and they having culture of erection of dolmen and mehir. Still to day Gadabas and Savaras having customary practice of erection of mehir when their leader dies. Dolmens, were erected by the Kurumbers, Bhils, and other tribes in Southern India and they are very common, perhaps more prequent than in any other part of India, in the valleys of the Kristna (***krishna river***) and its tributaries.[48] In India, where non-Arayan races like Kurumbas, Badagas are dolmens were constructed.[49] Ramesh, A, Blake, N.M., Vijayakumar, M., and Murthy, J.S. they published a paper, in their conclusive remarks, the presence of the genes Rz and r^y in the Mahabubnagar Chenchu is the interest, and the occurence of Rz in the Irula and Kurumba groups reported.[50]

Animism: Animism is earliest religion in which people believes in souls or spirits and worship trees, animals, water bodies, forest etc., hunter-gathering communities; they depend on chase and game, collect tubes and roots. Graham Harvey tries to explain as "Religion is an animist mistake about the nature of the world in which people 'believe in souls or spirits' or discourse about non-empirical beings. Religion is an animist mistake about the nature of the world in which people 'believe in souls or spirits' or discourse about non-empirical beings".[51]

No definition of animism has yet been given.E. B. Tylor defines animism as the belief in a range of spirit beings, who could occupy such bodies as "trees and rocks and waterfalls.[52] 'Animism' labels all or most indigenous religions, often when presented as the primitive or 'primal' substratum on which more advanced culture or religion may be constructed.[53]

Hindu: Hindu itself is not a religion, the term Hindu is denotes that, who are practicing, Hindu religious customs, beliefs called as Hindu. What is Hindu Custom? The Constitution of India does not define the term Hindu, but separate personal laws were recognised, and divide on the basis of religion as Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsis. Article 25(2) (b) Hindus, reference to persons professing Sikh, Jain and Buddhism are Hindus. Section 2 of Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; (a) to any person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms and developments, including a Virashaiva, a Lingayat or a follower of the Brahmo, Prarthana or Arya Samaj, (b) to any person who is a Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion, and (c) to any other person domiciled in the territories to which this Act extends who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion. It is clear that, the term Hindu is not a religion, but it is collection of religions.

Therefore, Hindu is not a single religion, which includes Saivam, Vaishnavam, Vira-saivam, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh, Animist and other minor religion practices. The Hindus, dominant upper caste people are claiming Animism is Hinduism. But Christian, Muslim, Parsi and Jews are not Hindus. Except these Christian, Muslim, Parsi and Jew religions, remaining all are Hindus in India. Which indirectly, the indigenous tribal practices are included in Hindu religion.

Savarkar devised his definition as very inclusive but still meaningful: A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatavarsha, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is the cradle-land of his religion. This means that a non-Indian cannot be a Hindu, even if he considers India as his Holyland; while a born Indian cannot be a Hindu if he considers a non-Indian place (Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome) as his Holyland. Since Jainism, Buddhism, Veerashaivism, Sikhism, and all Indian tribal cults have their historical origins and sacred sites on Indian soil, all Indian Jains, Buddhists, Veerashaivas, Sikhs and so called animists qualify as Hindus.[54] Gail Omvedt, says that, a 'Hindu' identity, in which all the various religions and sects originating in the Indian subcontinent are viewed as having a basic unity that is characterized by their flexible and comprehensive view of the divine and of the ultimate identity between the divine and the human soul.[55]

Dravidian: Chenchus are considered to be an Aboriginal tribes and Dravidian tribes. The term Dravidians means, they are ancient people, historically inhabitents of the south, having different language with northern people and having different folklore, and literature. Dravidians divided into four groups Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.[56] They were assumingly migrated from North to South around BC 19th to BC 18th Centuries and settled in South India.

These aboriginal tribes are belonging to one race at one point of time, but priestly castes in Southern India, were identified their nomenclature as Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, Yanadis. However, their exogamous and endogamous divisions connecting their blood relation, but recent times their exogamous divisions were increased with new surnames, on the basis of their occupation, residence, village, religion, cross marriages etc. However, these tribes do not have gotras (surnames) or exogamous divisions.

These aboriginal tribes of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, Yanadis are Buddhist and Jains before A.D 8th Century. After AD 8th Century these communities adopted Saivism, they became Saiva Sanyasis in South India, after AD 10th Century they adopted Vaishnavam, became Vaishnava Dasaris and AD 12th Century they embraced into Vira-Saivam became as Jangams. Therefore, their religious journey started from Animism to Hinduism by converting into Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Vira-Saivism. The Chapter-I of this book deals with early history of stone age people of Southern India, in which how ancient people lived in Southern India, and their historical evidences of dolmens, menhirs, stone circles etc. is described, establishing their way of live, belonging to Neolithic, Megalithic and Mesolithic connections, their religious journey from animism to Hinduism and animistic religious practices of ancient time. Chapter-II deals with religious practices of aboriginal tribes from Buddhism to Vira-saivam in Southern India.

Marriage alliances of Aboriginal tribes of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are differed from tribe to tribe. Chenchus perform love marriages. Animistic practices do not have

concept of tali (తాళి) practice, no dowry is exist in their marriage customs. However, the animist has practice of Oli (ఒలి) which is called as tera (తెర) system; there was no concept of arranged marriages. Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are having, the concept of divorce and remarriage, allowed to remarry both women and men. Birth rituals of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are simple in nature; initially birth rituals are performed on third day after child birth.

Death rituals are same for most of the tribes, they perform death rituals on third day of the death. Initially, Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are burying their dead, death pollution is not observed, but on third day perfom death ceremonies. Initially, they have a customary practice of erect dolmens, stone circles and menhirs as a memory of their tribal leaders. Superstitions: Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis believe that the dead person will become a devil (దెయ్యం), and devil take revenge against his relatives in the village. Folklore: Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis have their own style of folk songs and dances. Traditional mendicants Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are self-healing communities; they knew medicinal plants and trees. They cure their diseases by traditional medicine (నాటు వైద్యం).

Religion of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are animists, some of them practiced Buddhism, Jainism notions and belief, faith from BC 4th Century, Jain-Kuruba a separate tribe invented in the name of Jainism and after AD 8th Century some of these aboriginal tribes adopted Saivam. After AD 10th Century adopted Vaishnavam and after AD 12th Century is Vira-Saivam. Aboriginal tribes are worshipers of trees, water ponds, air, land and animals, these practices connected with Buddhism and animism.57

Deities of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis, initially they worship snakes, trees and their ancesters as their gods. Chenchus and Yanadis are worshiping a god called Chenchu Devudu. Gadaba has Takurani, for Irulas Kanniamma.

The Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are primitive tribes and Animist, they are living remote places and hill tracks. Their educational levels are very low. They are not able to compete with the other scheduled tribes and other castes candidates. Most of these people are illiterates and working as agricultural labourers and coolies. They loose their traditional occupation of hunting-gathering due to deforestation, restrictions of hunting by governments. Their educational status is very low, schools and teaching staff in tribal areas are very less, in compare with plain areas. Dropouts are continuously increasing at primary level in tribal areas, but plain areas some positive result has been achieved.

However, Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis are not able to compete with other tribal group of plain areas. These groups are very backward than the other tribal groups. Several non-tribal castes were listed in Scheduled Tribes list. Non-tribal Scheduled Tribe people are so advanced groups, they only accessing to reservation policy meant for aboriginal tribes (PVTGs). Even, PVTG quotas are captured by the non-tribal Scheduled Tribes.

Interview schedule: to complete this work I selected Chenchus and their habitations in Telangana (Nagarkurnool District) and in Andhra Pradesh (Prakasham District). In Telangana region, Pullaipally, Baurapur hamlets of Appapur village of Lingala Mandal selected. Chenchu

colony, Amangal, Ranga Reddy District, Chenchu colony Vasudevpur were selected and visited their hamlets and conducted detailed interview with interview schedule.

In Andhra Pradesh, Chenchu colony at Dornala, Thummalabailu, Chintala, villages and Chenchu colony (Mekalabanda), Srishailam, Chenchu colonies in Ahobilam is visited, interviewed several tribesmen were involved in my field work, among them, Thokala Pedda Guruvaiah, Bhumani Ravindra, School Teacher, Thokala Laxmi Devi, School Teacher are main source to acquire complete information.

According to field study they are primitive tribes, having primitive culture and leading primitive life, they are not interested to join with plain areas and main stream societies. They are also not interested to adopt Hindu cultural practices of marriage, divorce, inheritance, death, birth rituals; they engage their own priest to conduct their ceremonies. Recently, several *pentas* (పెంట) (village) of Chenchus were targeted by the Christian pasters belonging to Scheduled Caste, approaching them to convert into Christian faith, some of the Chenchu *pentas* (villages) are like Mallapur Penta, Lingala Mandal Christianised many Chenchus and engaged one Chenchu faster of Mallapur Penta (village).

Hypothesis: This research study has been done with two Hypotheses the first, Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, Yanadis are belonging to one group. The Second, their fore fathers were erected dolmens, menhirs and stone circles in South India. This research work is also framed three research questions of (1). Whether the Chenchu, Gadaba, Irula, Savara and Yanadi tribe are same stock or not? (2). Whether, dolmens, menhirs and stone circles were erected throughout the Southern India by the forefathers of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras and Yanadis and other aboriginal tribe of Southern India or not?

Methodology: this research work adopted a qualitative research methodology in which ethnographic techniques were used and snowball sampling was adopted, data was collected from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where the respondents are living. Interviews were conducted with tribal elders from the above states and regions with an interview schedule. Existing literature was studied and consulted previous researchers of these communities, consulted in various places and various universities in south India. Visual ethnographic technique is adopted to collect ancient evidences from acheological sites in South India. This work is findout some of un-discovered dolmens sites, like ‘Gonakole’ in Gundlapally mandal, ‘Penimilla’ Uppununthala mandal, Mannavaripalle & Padmaram thanda in Achampet mandal, Veldanda, which are erected by early men during Iron Age. These dolmens are undiscovered and unpublished by the government or scholars.

Aboriginal People of Southern India divided into seven chapters; Chapter-I deals with Early History of Stone Age People of Southern India. Chapter-II deals with Early History of Aboriginal People of Southern India. Chapter-III The Chenchus, Chapter-IV The Gadabas, Chapter-V the Irulas and Iruligas, Chapter-VI the Savaras and Chapter-VII Yanadis, these chapters explains about the early religious history of Chenchus, Gadabas, Irulas, Savaras, and Yanadis, its sub-divisions, and their endogamous, exogamous divisions, and the process of transformation of animism to hinduism. And also deals with demographic history, social, employment, economical and religious status.

End Notes

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